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As you have undoubtedly noticed by now, we take our published frequency, "from time to time", a little too seriously. We do mean to be more regular than we have been, but things keep coming up and . . . And in spite of the time since last ish, this one was put together in some haste; hence the illos for "REarming the Incomplete Enchanter" are decorative only. The various figures are not armed and armored in accordance with the accompanying text. Also, the long lapse brought in a good many letters that were just too good to keep any longer. Two more mail-order book dealers have come to our notice: Lois Newman, address next page, and Robert A Madle, 4406 Bestor Dr, Rockville MD 20853.

And Phil Seuling, 621 Avenue Z, Brooklyn NY 11223, sells poster-size reproductions of some of the Conan book covers by Frank Frazetta. He's been after us to put an ad in Amra, but we haven't gotten around to quoting him a price. Various mail-order book dealers are selling THE CONAN GRIMOIRE, edited by de Camp & Scithers, at \$6.95. It is a collection of articles, stories, poems, and songs, with artwork, from Amra, published in hard covers. And while we are at it: we ourselves are selling, at \$2 the copy, LET'S DRINK TO THAT, being a collection of notable dates of interest to fans of science, fiction, & science fiction; with illos by Roy G Krenkel; order soon -- we can use the money! Nextly, we have a new typing element; now we can speak in three tones of voice: this, this, & this! We are still working out when to use italic and when bold face for emphasis. Suggestions? And last, we are so proofread; it's just that the errors are invisible until too late!!!!

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Thuds & Scrolls: *Because of the time since the previous issue of Amra, very many very worthy books have piled up unreviewed. Rather'n waiting for proper reviews on these, we will remark briefly on them herewith, leaving to our esteemed contributors the freedom to pick any for more comprehensive dissection (or gilding) in a later ish. Meanwhile, you should bestir yourselves to enjoy these:*

GREAT CITIES OF THE ANCIENT WORLD, L Sprague de Camp, xvi+510pp, 136illus, 14maps; Notes, bibliography, & index: Doubleday & Co, Garden City NY, 1972; \$12.95. Several of the rough sketches for the dozen Krenkel drawings of this book have appeared in *Amra*; the finished works are, though somewhat reduced in size, even better. Maps are by Rafael Palacios. The text covers Thebes of Egypt, Jerusalem, Nineveh, Tyre, Babylon, Memphis, Athens, Syracuse, Carthage, Alexandria, Anurádhapura, Rome, Pātaliputra, and Constantinople. **Buy it!**

A WIZARD OF EARTHSEA, Ursula K Le Guin, 205pp, maps and chapter-heading illos: Parnassus Press, Berkeley CA, 1968; \$4.95. **THE TOMBS OF ATUAN**, Ursula K Le Guin, 163pp, maps and chapter-heading illos: Atheneum, New York, 1972; \$5.50. **THE FARTHEST SHORE**, Ursula K Le Guin, 223pp, maps and chapter-heading illos: Atheneum, New York, 1972; \$6.25. These three volumes follow the saga of Ged, Archmage, through youth, maturity, and the magic-haunted islands of Earthsea. Here, magic depends -- largely -- upon knowing the true names of things, creatures, and men. The hard-cover edition of the first of the three is not out of print but difficult to obtain; we suggest you try Lois Newman Books, Box 24560, Los Angeles CA 90024.

CHANGE SONG, Lee Hoffman, 203pp: Doubleday & Co, Garden City NY, 1972; \$4.95. A magic haunted world, again not our Earth, and a wholly different kind of magic.

THE CRYSTAL GRYPHON, Andre Norton, 234pp: Atheneum, New York, 1972; \$5.50. **SPELL OF THE WITCH WORLD**, Andre Norton, 159pp (paperback): DAW Books, New York, 1972; \$0.95. Both these are set in the same world, but are in no way sequels of each other or -- as far as we can tell -- of earlier volumes in the Witch World series. Of the two, the former is the better; it is told in alternating chapters from the viewpoint of the youth Kerovan and the maid Joisan.

DERYNI CHECKMATE, Katherine Kurtz, 302pp (paperback): Ballantine Books, New York, 1972; \$1.25. Conflict between magic and religion. A direct and close sequel to **DERYNI RISING** by the same author and publisher. All these books (except for **GREAT CITIES**) are sword-&-sorcery with the emphasis on sorcery, and (coincidence? no...) by talented ladies.

###

Rearming The Incomplete Enchanter



by Jerry Pournelle

A long time ago when I lived in fabulous Buena Park (a peaceful place now, with no fame beyond Knott's Berry Farm and an undeserved reputation for ultra-conservative politics; but prior to 1920 they used to shoot the sheriff at least annually) my telephone rang. It used to ring quite often, what with political campaigns, siding salesmen, rug cleaning outfits, and occasionally a rush call from the Apollo program on which I worked in those dear dead days before Space took second place to the Dole; but this time the voice at the other end was the *Amra* editorial staff, who Had A Problem: they were temporarily assigned in the Buena Park environs, wanted to publish *Amra* for some nefarious reason, and had no Selectric typewriter handy.

They were also short an article. The result was that *Amra* got typed on my machine -- the same one I'm using to do this article, by the way; those

Selectrics are *durable* -- and I wrote an article called "Arming the Incomplete Enchanter". My piece was all about what Harold Shea should have carried and didn't, when he went roaming about amongst the knights bold and ladies amorous of the *FAERIE QUEEN*, and at its end I promised to write another carrying the tale of Shea's quartermaster corps to its logical conclusion. I promptly forgot the promise and the *Amra* editorial horde being essentially Nice Guys about not bugging people (or maybe there's a message there? No, I'm sure not) I wasn't reminded of it again until my postman brought me a Book.

Now, my postman often brings me books. Usually, though, the Post Office hasn't utterly destroyed the mailing label and container -- and if it has, the book is in a similar state of decay. In this case, though, somehow at the Studio City Post Office there had arrived or appeared or materialized one each perfect copy of *THE CONAN GRIMOIRE*, shorn of all wrappings. Without even looking inside to see that there was an article by me he promptly brought it to my doorstep. I'm sure there's a message *there*.

Naturally I read my own article first, as what writer doesn't? And being reminded of my promise, and having several publishers' deadlines to meet, bills to pay, and people screaming at me for a story or article or something that will bring in money (no, not my publishers screaming; my creditors, and the Angel of My Life and Mother of My Children -- both the same creature, perhaps fortunately) I promptly sat down to fulfill my promise.

Where were we? I had last equipped Harold Shea with:

1. A fairly straight saber heavy enough for parries but light enough to fence

with, with a good handguard and a leather finger-loop for the index finger inside the guard.

2. A helmet, helmet liner, and suspension system with noseguard and shoulder plates.

3. A leather jacket with chain sewed into the right arm and vertical stripes of chain down the chest to protect against cuts which get through the parries. Three lengths of chain "should be sufficient" wrote I.

4. A poleaxe some five to seven feet long with point and axeblade, with handguards attached.

These, I had insisted, would have been superior to that épée which was so famous, but which was likely in the actual event to have got Harold sliced into mincemeat. I note that Mr de Camp more or less agreed with my analysis and was kind enough to say so at the end of my article.

Well, I've had some Second Thoughts. Many of them come from my alter ego, a gent known as Jerome Robert, Laird o' McKenna, Knight Marshal of the Kingdom of the West, who goes about getting bashed under the auspices of the Society for Creative Anachronism, Inc, and gets to watch a number of other gents do the same. When I wrote "Arming the Incomplete Enchanter" I'd had only experience with modern fencing -- ie, I was in the same position, and suffering from the same delusions, as Harold Shea before he visited the world of the Iron Men. Since then I've had the pleasure of fighting men in armor and doing a bit of it myself, and it's illuminating. (For those who'd like some of the same information, *Tournaments Illuminated* is available from the SCA for \$4/year, and well worth it; write the SCA at Box 1162, Berkeley CA 94701.)

My first conclusion is that Shea's épée wasn't as silly as I'd thought; it could be useful, but not as de Camp and Pratt intended. As I wrote in the earlier article, one swipe from a medieval broadsword would brush aside any parry you could make with an épée and probably break the toothpick in the bargain: a fact unalterably and painfully true. But Shea isn't going to parry. He isn't going to cross swords with his opponent either. I'd had a mental picture of the armored man standing in something like a modern fencing stance, but with his feet square and his body perpendicular to the line of engagement, his sword held out in front of him like Errol Flynn, making great sweeping cuts with a heavy sword that he could handle well enough but still being a bit unwieldy.



It don't Work That Way. Actually, the man in armor will stand with his left foot forward (assuming him righthanded), his shield held squarely forward, and his sword upraised above his head and parallel with the ground to protect from straight-down chops. He swings the sword in a wide arc without preparatory movement -- and when he does, Harold's dead.

However, if Harold's fast enough, he wins. He stands as far from his armored opponent as possible, and as soon as the "Begin" is cried he lunges, without preparation or warning, straight for the eye-slits. He'd better be accurate, because he gets one and only one chance; but a good épée man can hit a ping-pong ball bobbing about at the end of a long rubber band, so we assume Harold can do it too.



That's about the *only* thing Harold can do with that épée, though, if he's facing plate armor of good design. He has to go for a kill, and do it instantly, or else spend a lot of time retreating around the field waiting for a similar shot, and *then* do it instantly; but either way he gets one thrust only, it had better be lethal, and except for his lethal attack he can't afford to ever let his enemy get within striking distance of him. He can't be chivalrous and disable his enemy unless there is a really obvious chink in his opponent's armor, *and* a thrust to the chink will disable instantly. Otherwise he thrusts, the point goes in -- and the Iron Man slices Harold's head off.

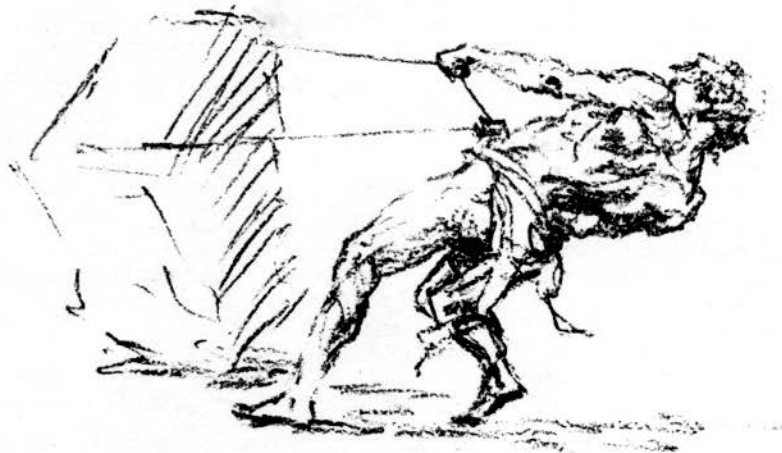
Against an armored man, though, the épée is likely to be more useful than that axe I designed. The épée will get through the armor -- there *have* to be eyeslits or holes to see out of -- more easily than the axe. Shea can lunge, giving him several feet more lethal radius than his enemy. His weapon is far more easily controlled than his enemy's -- and the épée far more likely to succeed than the axe, because Shea doesn't expose himself until he's actually killing his enemy with the épée, while just getting into distance with the axe will probably get Harold killed. Axe and shield (or axe without shield) does not win against sword and shield with equal opponents -- and Harold ain't nothing like equal in ability to the man he faces.

His fencing training will actually hamper him when he fights with medieval weapons.

Another of my conclusions that Have To Go was that Harold might be able to exploit his unarmored status, running about the field until his plated enemy tires, then approaching from behind and pushing that ton of junk down to the ground.

Uh-uh. Good plate armor doesn't tire you out that way. It doesn't hamper vision or movement very much, either. The idea of the unwieldy man unable to move is one of those myths whose origin I don't recall, but it was helped along by T H White who ought to have known better. [Shakespear's *HENRY V* helped too.] Now it is true that as gunpowder and longbow developed, plate got heavier and heavier, until we reached the period of King James VI (or I, according to the English). King James, watching one of his knights arm in the ~~Woppefully~~ wishfully firearms-proof armor of that late period, said: "I see the armor serves two purposes: it prevents anyone from harming my knights, and it prevents their

harming anyone else." Harold, though, is going to fight men in really well-designed plate who wear it precisely because it is more agile than chain-mail; being suspended from many points of the anatomy rather than shoulders only (as mail is), good plate is also less tiring.



In other words, Harold better stab quick and deep; he won't get behind his enemy and push him down or do any of the other rather clever things I'd thought he could do. Actually, if I'd been thinking when I wrote that nonsense, I'd have known better -- it should be obvious that the Iron Men wore armor for a reason, and they didn't dominate the peasants for centuries by making themselves ineffective. I'm reminded of the various forms of Oriental unarmed combat that are supposedly so superior to swords and like that: they were developed by subjugated peoples not allowed to have weapons; and they *stayed* subjugated by the weapons carriers.

Having saved the *épée* for use against single armored enemies who fight with broadsword and shield, and being glad of it because I *liked* that *épée*, we're faced with another problem: it won't work all that often. Those Iron Men weren't stupid, and after Harold has demonstrated that lunge -- which is really his only advantage: a long, thin, pointed weapon suitable for poking through eye-slits being known as long as was armor -- they're going to Take Steps. What they'll probably do is gang up on Harold and have their grooms kill him out of hand for unchivalrous combat, but assuming that one of them decides to face Harold in single combat, he'll put his shield up, crouch behind it, and over-run; literally bowl Harold over onto the ground. There are other things they could do, too.

The problem is, Harold still has no defense. He can't parry with the toothpick, he has only a limited number of places he can thrust to, and he must get out of the swordsman's reach or die. Can we not help him?

It does no good to cover him with armor. Weight *does* count, and neither Harold nor any of us in the Twentieth Century can design armor more adapted for the human frame than was made in the time of the *FAERIE QUEEN*. The Iron Men are stronger than Harold, more used to combat with their weapons, and far deadlier. Harold has only his skills as a Twentieth Century fencer, his wits, and his agility.

We *can*, however, give him some reasonable protection consistent with his advantages. A Great Kilt, for example. Now, I'm not talking about the modern, sewn, pleated kilt worn by gentlemen and paraders; I mean the old Genuine Article, about ten yards of thick woolen cloth, bunched up around the waist and over the kidneys, pleated over the legs, carried over the back in bunches and pinned over the left shoulder. I can testify that this makes pretty good armor. It probably wouldn't stand up to a really well-



aimed and well-delivered blow, but it provides far more protection than you'd think; unless the Iron Man gets his weight into it and cuts just right, Harold might, given the protection of a Great Kilt, survive for a second thrust.

Of course, we don't leave him with the kilt alone. The combat helmet with liner and riveted shoulder and face guards will have to be kept; and my leather jacket with chains sewn inside is a definite must, the difference being that now I'd advocate *wire* to attach the chains, and put the chains *outside* the jacket. I'd also advocate far more than the three lengths of chain I specified in "Arming the Incomplete Enchanter".

What about fighting an unarmored man? That was Harold's first encounter in the world of the *FAERIE QUEEN*, his opponent chivalrously shedding his iron suit to give Harold an equal chance. Well, it wouldn't go as described in the Sacred Texts. There wouldn't be any phrases, engagements, and parries. What would happen is the Iron Man would raise his sword, Harold would nimbly retreat in fencer's stance, the Iron Man would pursue -- and Harold lunges to get him neatly in the wrist, forearm, or elbow, preventing that deadly chop that takes Harold's head off. The result wouldn't be much different, but the methods would. That *épée* would work pretty well after all.

I discovered this in practice, fighting some of the Knights of the Society. They were ~~good~~ with broadsword or they wouldn't be Knights; but their technique hadn't taught them anything about defending against point attack to the arm. On the other hand, they weren't stupid; and after I'd done it to one, it was difficult to do it to him again -- or to someone who had seen it done. They adapted quickly, as would any man familiar with his weapons.

Thus, we are back to the requirement for a weapon with which you can parry. Harold can win an engagement or two with his *épée*; but after that the Iron Men will be wary of him, change their tactics, and use the weight of their swords and the strengths of their arms to dominate Harold's toothpick.

I am proud to say, then, that the basic weapon I chose for Harold in "Arming the Incomplete Enchanter" was correct: a good saber, not much curve and with a good sharp point -- the point attack is still our best -- but heavy enough to parry a broadsword attack, and with enough hand protection to keep Harold from getting his fingers cut off. If Harold had the strength of wrist to swing it properly, the Scottish basket-hilted broadsword -- called a claymore in a lot of the literature of the time it was used, I don't care what Mr de Camp says [or the custodian of the arms museum in the Tower of London, who agrees with him], although I concede that originally "claymore" is a corruption of the Gaelic word for a two-handed broadsword -- that would be the best thing he could carry. He probably couldn't afford a really good one, such as the Wilkinson I almost bought (but decided to make the house payment instead); but it would be a good investment. Armed with *that* and his ability to use the point, Harold would be a match for any unarmored man in town.

Since he won't have the strength to heft quite that much sword properly, we are back to the Civil War sabers mentioned in the Texts and rejected by Harold for unaccountable reasons; and they would have done quite nicely, again probably assuring Harold of success and survival.

In fact, I am now convinced that against unarmored men a good modern fencer would have done very well in Medieval times. Although the Society's Knights are probably not as good as the best of that era, they are good indeed, and we've been able to field-test the problem. The broadswordsmen fighting the modern saberman, each using the techniques he has learned, will lose if both are unarmored. Give the broadswordsmen his shield and you've got another problem. That shield is a **weapon**, and a good one. The Iron Man tucks himself in behind it, with-holding his weapons and arms and like that out of reach of even my best lunge; and it's hard to do anything to him. Then his forward rush with shield to over-run me is damned hard to stop or retreat from. Given retreating room, and given free use of the point, the modern fencer has a good chance, though. Take the point away from him, and he's doomed, even if you give him a





shield of his own. The point and the lunge are the modern's weapons, and he must be able to use them. Any attempt to fight on the Iron Man's terms gets the fencer killed rather quickly.

Where does that leave us, then? Actually, Harold is better off than I thought he might be. He carries:

1. The trusty épée, honed to needlepoint.
2. A good saber. Since both saber and épée won't weigh any more than the Iron Man's broadsword, Harold can carry both in the same scabbard, although designing a good scabbard for carrying a bell-guarded épée is far from easy, as I've learned to my sorrow.
3. Ten yards of good woolen tartan, a wide leather belt studded with metal rings, and knowledge of the arcane art of pleating this mess into a Great Kilt. He *could* (horrors) wear trousers under the kilt if he's worried about how his knobby knees look.
4. A good leather jacket sewn over with chain, the chain secured with wire.
5. A military helmet on which he has welded or riveted a nose-guard and shoulder plates; better would be that he finds out how to make chain mail and makes

himself a mail hood covering head and shoulders, and puts on nasal-armed helmet over that. (Pity that Harold couldn't have subscribed to *Tournaments Illuminated* in 1940.)

He uses the épée against unhorsed men in armor (against horsemen, he's dead anyway) and the saber against unarmored men who show some talent for fencing. He's prepared to retreat quickly -- that's in character anyway -- and avoid shield rushes. And although he's got some problems, he's got a better chance of living through all this than I originally thought.

Moreover, although I had promised in "Arming the Incomplete Enchanter" to look at what Harold might have taken if he'd had plenty of money, we'd stayed within the original limits of the Texts. There isn't a lot more to add to the package, even given unlimited funds and carrying capacity. He could use greaves, and they could be made reasonably cheaply from steel. Given a lot of time, he could sew iron rings flat onto his leather jacket -- William the Conqueror wore that type armor in preference to anything else -- starting with a knee-length leather overcoat. He could then discard the Great Kilt, but he'd want something under the jacket for padding. Quilting was used in *Them There Days* and would be available in 1940. A modern hunting crossbow might help keep his enemies at a distance and give him a bit of protection against cavalry. They're expensive, but anyone who can shoot a rifle can fire one pretty accurately. However, being slow on the reload, they're useable only against a single enemy (or several very slow ones).

With all this gear, a horse to help carry it wouldn't hurt, and a well-trained Alsatian dog might come in handy. But even with only the basics, Harold just may do all right at that. So once again we'll leave him under the curious gaze of his landlady. There sits Harold, wearing Great Kilt and greaves, two swords at his side and helmet on his head, while his landlady goes for the police. Quickly now, Harold, before the men in white coats come: "If P equals not-Q, Q implies not-P; which is equivalent to saying..."

Good luck, Harold. I think we might see you again at that. #####



Swackles:

On Conan's Psychology

by Jon M Harvey

Jan Strnad has dissected Conan and tried to explain his makeup, rightly or wrongly, in psychological terms. I would believe this analysis wrong, basically because of crass statements made without any plausible justifications for doing so and because Jan makes the fundamental mistake by directing his analysis at the wrong person, but more of this later.

The whole psychological makeup of Conan, as derived by Jan's analysis, is dependant upon the following psychological factors: that Conan's use of armour is to form an extensive erogenous zone; that he has homosexual tendencies beyond the norm, yet still retains his masculinity; he has never outgrown his castration complex, and that this is linked to both his armour and his weaponry, the latter of which is phallic in symbolism; and that he has an Oedipus complex. Jan Strnad's explanations for these conclusions are suspect, to say the least. For example, Jan mentions that Conan's weaponry, such as his broadsword and double-bladed battleaxe, are standard phallic symbols and that this fact is linked to his sublimated homosexuality. The symbolism is just stated -- there is no attempt of justification to the case in question, Conan himself, and so leaves it well open to suspicion.

If a person has a weapon, such as a sword or knife, that has no practical use in his situation, then the possession of the weapon can be interpreted as a symbol, the person being in need of such because he feels a lack in his makeup. A weapon, such as a sword or knife, when its purpose is to no more than alleviate a sense of impotence, is a phallic symbol of destruction. When some sort of weaponry is necessary in a practical sense then the possession of a weapon cannot justifiably be associated with a search of fulfillment of sexual anxieties. No one can disagree, after reading his adventures, that Conan's sword is a practical necessity. Nevertheless, even in a situation where a weapon is practical, its phallic symbolism still appears in cases where there develops an unnatural attachment between a person and his weapon. An example of this is Mike Moorcock's hero, Elric of Melniboné. Throughout his tales there is an unholy alliance between Elric and his sword, Stormbringer. The attachment is clearly homosexual in nature. The status of the sword is a stimulant to Elric; it instills into Elric the potential he lacks, which can be interpreted as his masculinity. Conan, on the other hand, has no attachment with any particular weapon, although the sword is the dominant weapon, he discards weapon after weapon, possibly in much the same way as he disposes with his feminine companions.

The argument that the clothing of armour is a subconscious formation of one large erogenous zone is as dubious, primarily because such a zone is usually of a sensitive nature, the sensitivity being the centre of satisfaction when the zone is excited. By practicality, armour is as unsensitive as possible; hence, there would be no sexual significance in such. The practical purpose of armour is to protect; and this is why Conan wears it, or, more to the point, that is why Howard designed Conan to wear it. Jan Strnad



suggests that the concepts of armour being a form of an extra erogenous zone and being merely a protective skin are not mutually exclusive, yet Jan puts forward no reasons why they should not be so.

With reference to Conan's sublimated homosexuality, Jan Strnad refers the reader to the fact that Conan always appears to have dumped the girl he has picked up in one story by the time he starts his next adventure. Why he does so should be pretty obvious, and in no way suggests that he could not form a permanent relationship with some member of the opposite sex. Howard wrote the Conan stories separately for magazine publication. With such a loose format, any type of tie the writer put on his character would have severely restricted him; and anyway, who wants to read story after story containing the same backing cast of characters? Also, one must remember, Conan has no freedom of choice; his life is dictated by his writers. [Unfair: one can discuss Conan -- or any literary character -- as a real person OR as a figment of the writer's imagination; it is awkward and inelegant to try to do both at the same time. We and Strnad agreed on the former approach; Strnad's article should be judged on that basis. Incidentally, this letter of Harvey's has been Editorially Shortened.]

18 Cefn Rd, Cardiff CF3 3HS Wales #####

On Conan's Psychology

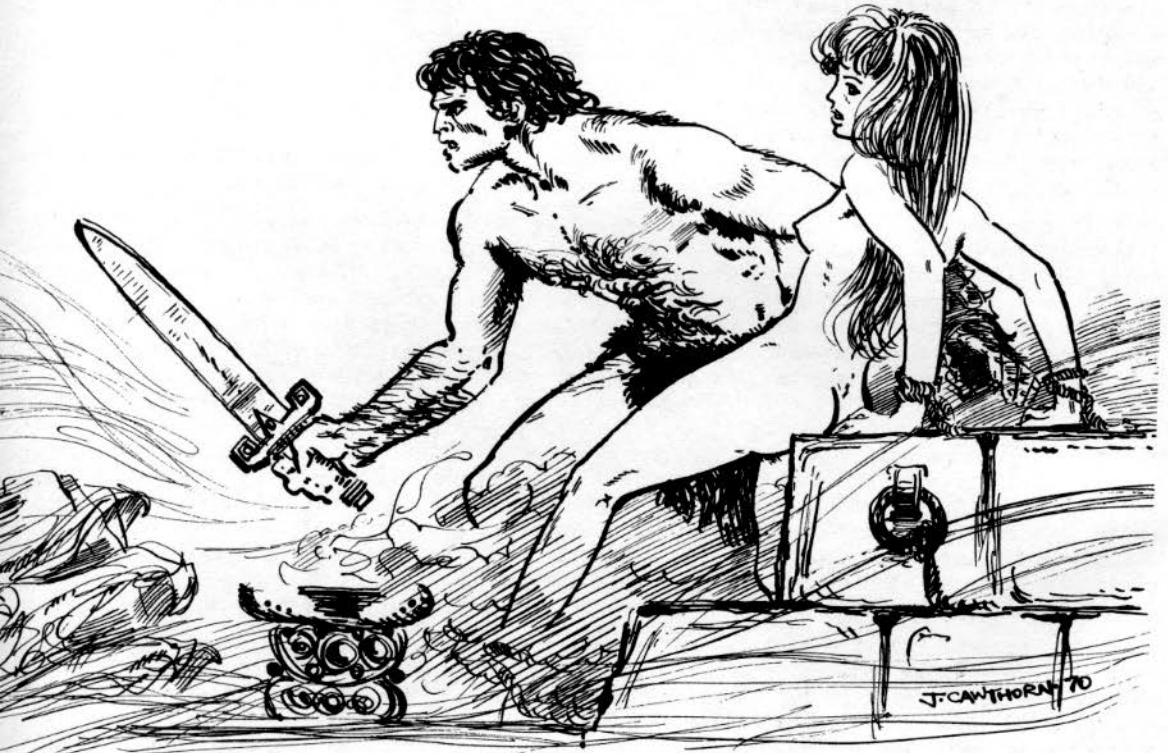
by Jeff May

Jan Strnad's "Psychological Conan" was very good, even impressive. Of course, if he really wanted to impress me, he would have read that aloud -- in Conan's presence. In our times the singer Melanie Safka neatly summed up much of modern psychology in her song "Psychotherapy". One verse goes (to the tune of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*):

"Freud's mystic world of meaning, needn't have us mystified.
It's really very simple, what the psyche tries to hide.
A thing is a phallic symbol, if it's longer than it's wide,
As the Id goes marching on.

"Glory, glory psychotherapy . . ."

1603 E Division, Springfield MO 65803 #####





On Conan's Psychology
by Tom J J Opilla

The latest -- and best -- definition of a living creature is one which:

- α) eats
- β) grows
- γ) reproduces

Amoeba, plant, and human fulfill this set of definitions. And so does Conan. A simplification of the above would break living-beings' drives down into two main categories: Self-preservation and The Continuation of the Species. In that order.

The fact is that some humans participate in violence for the sheer joy of it. There are no sexual connotations in that violence; I grew up in the ethnic ghettos of North Jersey and learned to break heads for the thrill of it. I assure you, Mr Strnad, that I did

not ejaculate while besting my adversaries. Fact is, I didn't even get a hard-on.

This preoccupation with reproduction or with the pleasures of the reproductive act is a reflection on the sexual inadequacies of Sigmund Freud [or his patients], not on humanity as a whole. If a generation of psychologists are determined to build a science on Freud's hangups, it is their loss, not the world's. Freud's philosophy no longer works; he may have broken the bonds of Victorian prudishness and opened the way to a frank appraisal of sexual drives, but that is all he did.

Conan lived life to enjoy it, and nothing more. Sure, he was attracted to physically powerful women, such as Valeria and Bêlit. He had enough sense to choose women who were muscular enough to withstand his body. Conan's choice of women would emasculate the average man, but Conan was hardly the average man. [This has been Edited also, mostly to shift the focus from the writer to the article being attacked.] 31 Meadow Ln, Laurel MD 20810 #

On Conan's Psychology
by Frederic Wertham,
MD

May I say a few words in Amra in defense of Conan? The article "The Psychological Conan" in v2#57 reduces Conan to



a composite cliché of Freudian terminology. That is not the image Howard created and thousands of readers enjoy. The real Conan is anything but that. He cannot be reduced to such a lifeless formula.

The article goes in for all the superficial, mechanical applications of static psychoanalytic labels, without any dynamic clinical evidence: Conan's broadsword is, of course, a "standard phallic symbol", his armor is "an extensive erogenous zone", he is alleged to suffer from an unconscious "not resolved castration complex", his attitude towards his companions and women shows "tendencies towards homosexuality". his investigating and exploring of tombs and secret passages shows a "desire for heterosexual relations."

Psychoanalysis of living people and of literary figures requires not the labeling with Freudian terms but an interpretation based on concrete data. This article represents a misunderstanding of both psychoanalysis and Conan. Howard and Conan deserve better.

Route 1, Kempton PA 19529 ###

[There were a number of letters asking, "Was Strnad *trying* to be funny?"* and a few more that simply assumed he was, and very successfully at that. Strnad himself -- in a letter that was subsequently Devoured by Dragons, Gnawed up by Gnomes, or just lost -- pointed out that he had written the article several ages ago and that he wouldn't put it quite that way now. The subject, however, should be good for a few more rounds, and we're particularly interested in comment on the penultimate sentence of the Opilla's swackle.]

On Heroes, Oafish & Otherwise

by Ken Bulmer

Now that Lin Carter has made an attempt to build up what he thinks of as the proper hero for s&s and has further aggravated the situation, I suppose I might as well get it off my chest. In *Amra* v2#52 Sprague de Camp complains about the big, blundering, dumb, oafish barbarian -- and I agree with him, mark you -- but then he compounds his previous misjudgement in a short notice when he calls Kandar such a one. I don't know if you've read KANDAR, but even a most cursory inspection will reveal that Kandar the man is not in traditional oafish barbarian mould, quite the contrary, although he can act with all the vicious barbarity of your true barbarian. I get the impression Sprague de Camp was de-

luded with rubbishy new s&s books and just skipped into a few pages here and there, with the consequence that he put his foot in his mouth in print -- not a usual act for so distinguished a contributor to your pages. In addition, in the mentioned short notice, he does not make it clear that it can only be Sprague de Camp who is embarrassed when Kandar makes love (a strange attitude for so sophisticated a man) for one of the german points about the particular scene wherein Kandar makes love with his two skull-buddies in attendance is to demonstrate not only their essential unity but also that love as such is a multi-dimensional feeling and in this case is without the kind of shame/embarrassment that de Camp appears to have suffered.

In *Amra* v2#54 you were good enough to open your [swackle] column a trifle to some of the discontent that must be floating about over the non-recognition of

* The punctuation mark (U) is standard fanspeak for an inexact quotation.



some of the newer writers -- and whilst I agree whole-heartedly that a very great deal of the flood of s&qs was indisputably 'not-too-eptly written' (My God! Some was awful!), I do agree with Douglas Mönch -- and not only because he is kinder to *KANDAR* than the others. Jeffrey May also puts into perspective some of the work of the old *Amra* regulars. Surely the policy of a fanzine that cares about the medium in which it labours should be to encourage good work in that field and to criticize fairly but firmly decrepit and ill-written work, even if this latter happens to be written by the old gang? [Well, mostly we print what we get; the tone & bias of the incoming material influence *Amra's* content rather more than most of you realize.]

Having said all that -- a most uncharacteristic piece of dialectic for me, I do assure you -- I must say that Krenkel is, in my opinion, just about the top fantasy illustrator. I know nothing about him, and I do like some of your other artists, notably Kirk and also Barr in some areas, but to me, Krenkel stands head and shoulders above them all. I look forward to a complete portfolio of his views of ancient cities. As I say, my gripe is that you do not seem to sort out the modern trash from the modern decent stuff, and are a trifle too ready to print glowing reports of mouldering old stories that should have died the death after their first appearance. What is of interest is the tragic and sudden ending to what was to all appearances a great new wave of s&qs. This is probably traceable to the over-production of under-standard material, accurately reflected in your pages and in your letter column; but, in your opinion, is the growth of s&qs still healthy and upward and onward at the present time? Of course, you may say with all truth that in such a restricted genre we already have enough, and a small part of my critical apparatus tends to agree with this view, until I realize what can be done and what must be done in the way of new visions and new glories.

19, Orchard Wy, Horsmonden, Tonbridge, Kent #####

On Comics & Wilbur-the-Troll's Plaint

by Jeff May

You correctly noted in *Amra* v2#56 that Marvel Comics' *Conan the Barbarian* is thriving, but I had words with them some time back over Conan's character. My letter, edited and misanswered, appeared in *Conan the Barbarian* #16. [Maybe they're taking lessons from us? We edit letters too...] Is it in character for Conan to deliberately and for revenge throw a woman, even a wicked one, down into the jaws of a monster? This happened in *Conan the Barbarian* #12, and I still think it's out of character. Do you or any other reader know of anything in the Howard stories which proves definitely that Conan is or is not willing to kill a woman in cold blood? [Since the Howard-Conan stories constitute a finite set, failing to find a case of Conan killing a woman would be the most definite possible proof that Conan is not willing. In the book *CONAN*, page 141 of the Lancer edition, the story "Rogues in the House", Our Hero deals with the girl who betrayed him into the hands of the local fuzz: he drops her into a cesspool, then permits himself a low rumble of laughter as he listens to her floundering and profanity. *This*, we submit, is a clear indication of how far Conan's personality will allow him to go. The editors of Marvel have read the Howard-Conan stories; but they still think comic-book, though less often than before.]

Sword-and-sorcery is alive and well at D C Comics, too. Barsoom, Pellucidar, Amtor, & other Burroughs' stories are all being done as comics. Art on Barsoom and Pellucidar



are especially good. However, the writer for the John Carter comic has condensed *PRINCESS OF MARS*, *GODS OF MARS*, and (presumably, possibly) *WARLORD OF MARS* into one, much shorter story. I don't know if this is good or bad; it does seem to me that they should be condensed for comics, but I wonder if they haven't gone to extremes.

In *Amra* v2#54 I had a swackle commenting on the quantity of good versus bad heroic fantasy. What set me off was Wilbur the Troll's plaint that it was getting harder and harder to pick the heroic fantasy gems out of the crud that was everywhere. I found that there were more really good books than really bad ones, and another group that could be called fair. I saw no justification for Wilbur's fear that the flood of crud would rise until it submerged the good stuff.

But yea, and also verily, it hath come to pass as Wilbur foretold. The hf boom does seem to have fallen off. I seem to recall comments here and there in other zines that readers have been put off by the stereotyped, hack-written junk. That isn't very logical, for aside from the tolerable 'fair' hf books, there are more good hfs than bad ones. Even if you buy heroic fantasy entirely at random you shouldn't strike out all the time; you have better than a 50-50 chance of getting a good book rather than a bad one. If you use a little judgement in your reading your chances improve considerably. All you have to do is look a little, and the good hf will come to you readily.

In that last line lies the answer to why did the boom pop. The cover of many of the awfuler hfs was a besworded lout in a jockstrap menaced by a Menace; to many readers, this is a sign of Sword and Sorcery, and they didn't connect anything else with the Sacred Genre. Also, to look successfully, you have to be Into It, and the multitudes of average readers on whom the hf boom depended were not into it the way *Amra*eders are. The boom burst because the average reader couldn't find anything but crud S&S, and so he gave up. Or maybe the heroic fantasy popularity cycle just cycled out.

No joke. The first wave of hf's popularity was in the mid-1930's, and *Weird Tales*. The next was in the early '50's, and the Gnome *CONANS*. The latest was in the late '60's, with Burroughs, Tolkien, Howard, and the others [set off, to a considerable degree, by Don Wollheim, then at Ace Books; and by the Lancer *CONANS*.] That's about a 17-year cycle. [Like the cicada!] Better start getting those books and stories ready for 1984, folks, 'cause the next boom should start peaking about 1986. [The unknown factor this time is the recent involvement of comic book publishers in sword-&-sorcery; are they nuturing the seeds of another resurgence, or are they but vultures picking over the carcass of the last?]

1603 E Division, Springfield MO 65803 #####

On John Carter

by the ArchAgent, Archie Mercer

From *DO YOU KNOW CORNWALL?* by G A Stevens, on sale in 1970 for 3/6d in that county:

John Carter was probably Cornwall's most notorious smuggler, not only on account of his daring exploits but also because of his memorable nick-name, the King of Prussia. This latter was due to his remarkable likeness to Frederick the Great of Prussia, and in turn has caused the rocky inlet which formed his hide-out near Perranuthnoe on the coast of Mount's Bay to be called Prussia Cove.

Carter was entirely fearless, on one occasion re-couping from the preventive men a whole load of contraband which they had taken from him earlier in the day. He was probably the only smuggler in Cornwall to mount a battery of guns -- on the cliffs above Prussia Cove -- as a deterrent to over-curious revenue cutters cruising off-shore. But his warning shots brought retaliation in the end, for his guns were destroyed and his own nefarious activities terminated.

Various other guide-book-type literature also refers in passing to this matter. Nothing seems to be particularly specific about dates, but on the face of it there seems a strong likelihood of there being Something In It...

21 Trenethick Parc, Helston, Cornwall ###

On Tigerish Grace

by E Hoffman Price

Japanese swordsmanship-in-action has grace and elegance of motion such as I have not seen in any ballet group display. Regardless of age, there is the suggestion of the mechanized, the stilted. The *samuri* swordsman's moves have the fluent sweep of a pouncing tiger. Having spent a day, filming pouncing tigers, and missing shot after shot, because my eye had not been trained to follow such sleek, swift moves, I venture the comparison

which I have made.

A recent display of *gung fu*, which includes much more than bare handed mayhem and bone fracturing, and is indeed the entire spectrum of Chinese combat, taking in swords, pikes, quarter staff, and "double axe", confirms my earlier opinions. The *gung fu* expert levels off and delivers a kick so swift that it's hard to follow; and when one lands, the impact is crisp as a whip-lash. And this kick reaches to eyebrow level, or higher.



I do not suggest that these exercises were designed to promote gracefulness. They are training for the fine art of man-killing, which becomes ever more necessary

in our American culture, if one is to return from the supermarket with groceries, the change, and one's life ... for the elderly, the arthritic, the over-weight, I'd suggest a short barreled revolver. You can drive six shots into the guy's solar plexus before he is near enough to slug you -- even if he's a *gung fu* master. Now that we've sketched the problem, nothing to do but work out the detailed solution.

Box 406, Redwood City CA 94064 ###

On Speed & Lovecrafty Racism
by Harry Warner jr

I don't think a scientifically inaccurate duel would worry me as much as it does Michael McQuown. I've never been able to move my eyes fast enough to keep track of the way the swords move in the movie duels, and I don't even notice the exact type of sword because I'm trying so vainly to see who is winning. Maybe we'll get instant replays with slow-motion on the late show pretty soon for every duel scene.

I gather that Sprague isn't certain whether Lovecraft read the Chamberlain book. A very large proportion of the population in the early XXth Century felt as HPL did without benefit of *FOUNDATIONS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY*. Around 1905, for instance, a local historian compiled a fat volume of biographies of current and recent residents of this country. Out of all the hundreds of people included, there were no blacks, one Jew, and two first-generation immigrants, even though those three categories made up perhaps 25% of this county's population at the time. I found in a local newspaper in around 1912 a report on a talk given by a Maryland Department of Education official here, telling about plans for local Negro schools. He started off something like this: "Of course, we know it is impossible to give the coloreds a genuine education." Around the same time, the local newspapers didn't use the name of someone who had done something newsworthy if he belonged to certain ethnic groups. A story might say: "An Italian employed at the Security cement works broke both legs in a fall yesterday." I imagine that fear lay behind much of this prejudice: fear that the enormous quantities of immigrants from Europe would take away Aryan's jobs, drive down wages, cause small and cheap houses to spring up within sight of large, expensive homes. Incidentally, Wagner, for all his Jew-hating, was just like HPL in his liking for individual Jews; and there is some possibility that Wagner's obsession with the matter may have been an unconscious way of fighting the possibility that a Jew may have been his father. There's some doubt about his paternity; and deep within Wagner's mind may have been the reasoning that since I'm obviously a genius, I can prove that I'm really the son of my mother's husband if I can convince everyone that all Jews like the one in my family scandal are inferior and therefore incapable of bequeathing these great abilities which I have inherited somehow.

423 Summit Av, Hagerstown MD 21740
#####

Sprague's Swackles : deCampages

by L Sprague
de Camp

On Sources:

Precursoritis: "I saw the form waver from sex to sex, dividing itself from itself, and then reunited. Then I saw the body descend to the beasts whence it ascended, and that which was on the heights go down to the depths, even to the abyss of all being. The principle of life, which makes organism, always remained, while the outward form changed."

--- Arthur Machen: "The Great God Pan", in *THE HOUSE OF SOULS* (NY: 1923), p 237.

"Where there had been the likeness of a human face, there was no face at all, and the metal limbs melted and changed... in his dying throes Khosatral Khel had become again the thing that had crawled up from the Abyss millenniums gone." --- Robert E Howard: "The Devil in Iron", in *CONAN THE WANDERER* (NY: 1968), p 122.

On Animals:

Catherine Crook de Camp (278 Hothorpe Ln, Villanova PA 19085) would like the names, dates, and authors of science-fiction and fantasy stories which are suitable for younger readers, in which a major rôle is played by animals, for a possible anthology.

On Slopsism:

No, I did not call Ezra Pound a "slopsist" (*Amra* v2#56, p19, line 7). That was somebody's typography. I called him a "solipsist", which you may look up if you are doubtful. "Slopsist" sounds much worse. Incidentally, if I had had any say in this recent dispute over denying Pound a prize because of his Fascism, I should have voted against him -- not, however, for political reasons, which I deem irrelevant, but because I don't think him that good a poet.

On C A Smith:

Ballantine's second volume of the other-worldly stories of the late Clark Ashton Smith, titled *HYPERBOREA*, has been published with an introduction by Lin Carter, editor of the series. It includes "The Seven Geases", "The Weird of Avoosl Wuthoqqan", "The White Sybil", "The Testament of Athammaus", "The Coming of the White Worm", "Ubbo-Sathla", "The Door to Saturn", "The Ice-Demon", "The Tale of Satampra Zeiros", and, showing CAS's humor at its sardonic best, "The Theft of Thirty-Nine Girdles". There are also several of CAS's "prose poems" and a note by Carter on the geography of Hyperborea and the mutual borrowings of CAS and HPL. This is an absolute must for any Hyborians worthy of the name.

On Lovecraftiness:

This one is too good to keep to myself. When my wife recently mentioned to a medical acquaintance of ours that I was writing a book on Lovecraft, the MD said: "Oh, I didn't know that Mr de Camp was an expert on sexual techniques!"



"Fynn Defends the Ford"

On "Gurre":

As a footnote to Poul's translation of the "Gurre" (*Amra* v2#55, pp4-9), I believe that Fletcher Pratt used the story of Valdemar and Tove as the basis of the First Tale of the Well, about Argentarius and Lanheira, in Chapter 6 of *THE WELL OF THE UNICORN*.

On Two Queries:

Can any of you readers help me with two questions: (1) Does anybody know of the whereabouts of a complete copy of H P Lovecraft's amateur magazine *The Conservative*, v1#1, March 1915? Somebody stole the copy in the NY University Library Amateur Press collection; the Brown University Library has only a photocopy of part of the issue; and I have been unable to find copy in the other big HPL collections like Irving Binkin's Grill collection. (2) Can anybody identify a mythological character who, thrown into a pit of venomous serpents, charmed them by playing his harp with his toes? I believe one serpent, not a lover of good music (possibly an early rock fan) finally did the hero in.



"The Three Green Archers from Khest"

On Antique Apes:

According to an article in the *Scientific American* for January 1970, the huge fossil primate *Gigantopithecus* (formerly called *Gigantanthropus*) is not now considered, as it was at first, a carnivore, pouncing on prey and dragging it to a hillside cave to devour, like one of Howard's super-apes, which are its fictional prototype. On the basis of four jawbones and some isolated teeth, it is now thought to have been a grammivore (i.e., living mainly on the seeds of cereal grasses) dwelling on the Pleistocene savannahs of South China and North India. It is no longer deemed partly ancestral to man (as the late Dr Weidenreich thought) but much closer to the gorilla, probably resembling a gorilla 9 feet tall when standing erect, and weighing circa 600 pounds. And **PO!** goes the assumption of my story "Throwback"!

On Quaint Streetcars:

This historical curiosity may interest the patrons of the Terminus, Owlswick, & Ft Mudge Electric Street Railway, from *DUTY, HONOR, EMPIRE (THE LIFE & TIMES OF COL. RICHARD MEINTZERHAGEN)* by John Lord: when Meintzerhagen landed in Mombasa in 1902, "Richard's first day in Africa was a delight... The rest of the day he spent marveling, propelled by two coolies through Mombasa township in a trolley. The miniature track ran along the principal street and branched away at numbers of offices and private houses whose residents, of course, maintained private trolleys. Richard thought it a novel way of traveling..." (p 181) [Similar systems existed -- some may still -- in some Central American towns, where the streets are without either gravel or paving. Archaeologists use the same arrangement, with metal-tied track of gauge of about 18 to 24 inches, for carrying away the excavated overburden. Tracks were in place at Tiryns [[Heracles's stamping grounds]] and Delphi, looking of about the right size for centaur-drawn transit.]

Limericks:

There once was a foolish young Stygian
Who hadn't the brains of a pigeon;
When out on the make,
He met with a snake,
And thus all at once got religion.

#####

-- John Boardman

Though the years and the centuries fly,
It seems Conan never did die;
He's been fighting, say mages,
For five or six ages,
In a country just south of Khitai!

-- John Boardman

The exploits of Carter's Thongór
Smack strongly of others before;
But still they're great fun,
So I read every one,
And I'm fully in favor of more.

-- Robert Grant

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